

## [Character Sketch of Informant and Wife]

Mass 19

6/14/39 [?]

Name: Jane K. Leary, 32 Acorn St.

Informant: James Hoghes Hughes , 51 Johnson St.

Assignment: The Shoe Laster of Lynn (Living Lore) Character Sketch of Informant and Wife

Within a five minute walk from Central Square lives this old shoe laster with his wife and brother-in-law, in a rather [sparsely?] furnished but scrupulously clean five room, high ceilinged flat of a "three tenement block." Unlike many Irish homes, this one is almost totally devoid of the numerous knickknacks that usually clutters congested rooms. There is space in the living room between the divan and chairs, piano and radio— a distinct feeling of room to breathe.

"James" walks with the bit of stoop to his gait that is characteristic of aged lasters, and his hair and close cropped mustache are altogether white. He seems a bit too restless to be 79 however; lacking is the resigned peacefulness of a life fulfilled.

One has the feeling when visiting him, that this home has not imprisoned enough dreams to satisfy its occupants. Peace and harmony is not lacking, but it is the peace and harmony of dreams that never were, rather than that of dreams approaching satiety.

This, to all appearances has been a marriage of convenience. Time and again the husband gave away this fact in his conversations 2 with me. He told me the story of two little motherless girls, his children by his first wife, who had to spend their babyhood in an

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orphanage. Sometimes, the grieving father felt, there was not enough fresh eggs there to make little bodies sturdy— and perhaps not enough specialized love to make little persons as carefree as children have a right to be.

“When ma first wife daied,” he told me during one interview, “I boarded the children with a family in Lynnfield. An thiey loved 'em too. Thiey'da brought 'em up too if I'da said the word. But thiey wuz Protestants an' I cun't see thet, so I hed ta put 'em in the home.”

“Whin thiey wuz fieve an' six, I married agin, an' ma wife wuz good to 'em an' brought 'em up raight. She come from County Monohan too, ya see. It wuz her brother, the one thet's alivin' with us now, thet first give ma the notion ta come ta America.”

Mutely hanging above the divan where my informant sat, the picture of his second wife's mother seemed to tell the other side of the story. It was the only picture in the room, strong , plain and unadorned as the room itself. It had in it though, the poignancy of a story that should be told. I was glad therefor that one day when I called, that “James” was not at home.

His wife answered the doorbell. She asked me to come inside “an' heve a seat fir yourself fir a minute ‘er two”.

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She had a plain face, until ambling forth in conversation with her, I discovered her to be like the picture on the wall— poignant beneath her plain exterior exterior .

“I hada a mind ta marry once whin I wuz young,” she told me. “But ya see, him thet I wuz goin' with, din't want ta wait till I siaved enough money ta bring ma mother an' ma father over from Ireland. All thier children wuz hiere an' thiey wanted ta come too.

“I wuz adoin' housewirik thin. I had bin goin' with this fella fir quate (quite) a tame whin I first come ta Lynn. Thin fir a time we sorta broke off an' he wint with another girl.

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"But one diay I wint down town to buy somethin' fir a woman I wuz awirkin' fir. I passed him on the strate (street) awalkin' with another girl. But he smiled at me laiike. An' whin I got back to the place whiere I wuz awirkin' thiery he wuz asittin' in the kitchen awaitin' fir ma. An' from thin on we wint together all the tame agin.

"It wuz not long after this thet he said he wanted ta get married. An' I did too 'cause I laiked him a lot. But ya see I did not heve the heart ta disappoint ma father an' ma mother. Ya see they wuz all alone in Ireland an' remimberin' ma sister thet hed come out hiere before ma. She daied only six wakes (weeks) after she come. In the 4 same male with a letter from her asayin' she wuz agoin' ta wirk in ma uncle's factory, come the letter sayin' she wuz dead an' buried. She got a cold on the trip over an' she niver got over thet. But they din't know it, ma uncle an' aunt where she wuz alivin'. They noticed she din't look sa good an' ma aunt called a doctor.

"'thet girl', said the doctor 'is homesick. She'll ba all raight after a whale (while). But a couple a diays after thet she daied. An' she wuz buried hiere an' none a us in Ireland knowed inytheng about it atall 'till it wuz all over.

"Yes, thet's how come I sint thet man I laiked awiay. He married someone else after a tame.

"James's" wife told me other tidbits of her history during the afternoon too. She worked in the G. E. for a number of years, supporting the parents she brought from Ireland. Then "James" came along and another suitor who ' din't heve much hair on the top of his head."

"An once I heard thet James said ta someone whin he wuz acomin' ta see ma, 'I wish thet bald headed man 'ould stiai awiay from thiery."

After her marriage, James wife worked in the shoe shops at times, in addition to keeping house, and caring for the two children of her husband's first marriage. Then, in the years following the world war, when intermittent jobs at hand lasting made it difficult for James

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5 to earn enough money to adequately support his household, she became a night scrub woman for one of the Lynn banks.

Her fifteen dollars a week she earned, and this sum she got when the other scrub women were only getting thirteen. For she had the dentist's floor, the "hardest of all" and including the business suite of one [?]man who was" awful perticular". Knowing her worth she had not been afraid to "speak up" when the bank representative was reducing the wages. For when she came down to twelve dollars, they were reduced to ten. So on it was until she was getting but seven . I quit then," she said, "for I wuz gettin' old an' I wuz sick."

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